



Arizona Department of Agriculture

1688 W. Adams Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85007
(602) 542-4373 FAX (602) 542-5420

MEDIA ADVISORY FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT: Rae Chornenky 542-0982

WEST NILE VIRUS DIAGNOSED IN ARIZONA HORSE

(Phoenix, AZ) The Arizona Department of Agriculture, through its State Veterinarian, Dr. Rick Willer, has announced the first 2004 West Nile Virus positive diagnosis in an Arizona horse. The horse's attending veterinarian reports the horse has been in the same Phoenix stable location for the past few years thus, there is no travel issue involved.

The Department of Agriculture continues to stress the importance of having horses vaccinated against what is known as equine Sleeping Sickness, or Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE) and against West Nile Virus. Both diseases are transmitted to horses by mosquitoes that feed on infected birds.

Sleeping Sickness (WEE) is caused by a virus found in mosquitoes in various locations in Arizona nearly every year. West Nile Virus (WNV), a new variety of Sleeping Sickness, was first identified in the eastern U.S. in 1999. West Nile Virus has since spread westward across the country and last year was found in nearly every State, including Arizona.

Symptoms of WEE and WNV in horses include neurological signs such as depression, lack of appetite and coordination, circling, muscle tremors and head pressing. The affected horse may go down and not be able to rise. In 20% to 50% of cases, the disease results in death. If a horse displays these symptoms, a veterinarian should be contacted.

"I recommend horse owners have their horses vaccinated now because both WEE and WNV may be prevented through vaccination," advises Dr. Willer. The WEE vaccination should initially be given in two doses at 30 day intervals with an annual booster thereafter each spring to early summer in order to build immunity in advance of mosquito activity. For WNV protection, two vaccine products are now available and horse owners should consult their veterinarian to determine which product is advisable for use. Both require multiple injections at specified intervals in order to provide protective immunity and annual or semi-annual boosters are strongly recommended.

Arizonans are reminded that while vaccination is important to protect horses from these viruses, their use does not diminish the need for mosquito control. Arizona Department of Health Services has asked that horses and people be protected from exposure to WEE and WNV by elimination of water where mosquitoes breed. Eliminate standing water by removing or covering objects which may collect water such as old tires, coolers, cans, buckets and barrels. Water in bird baths and animal troughs should be changed at least twice a week.

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